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SUBJECT: AF/E Director Reddick in Antananarivo

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In Madagascar April 15-18, East Africa Bureau (AF/E) Director Reddick paid a courtesy call on the Prime Minister to discuss the April 4 referendum and ongoing disaster response. In meetings with the Red Cross and the Presidency, Director Reddick explored possible solutions to Madagascar's chronic prison problem. Director Reddick also took part in a planning session for upcoming democracy advocacy activities following up on the December 3 election. END SUMMARY.

Prime Minister Rabemananjara

12. (SBU) In a cordial meeting with the Prime Minister, General Charles Rabemananjara, AF/E Director Reddick and the Ambassador inquired about the connection between the April 4 referendum and the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP). PM Rabemananjara explained the Constitutional reforms were needed to allow the President to manage the country and implement the choices made by the Malagasy people. The MAP is complementary, he continued, as it is the country's first long term economic blueprint for development. The Prime Minister expressed satisfaction with the referendum result, calling the 75 percent approval a sign of the people's confidence in the Government.

13. (SBU) Moving to disaster relief, the Prime Minister thanked the United States for its response to the series of cyclones that have hit Madagascar. Commenting on the ongoing Government-led relief effort, he said coordination must be improved. PM Rabemananjara said all GOM agencies and partners must make decisions on accurate and timely information about the situation on the ground across the country.

Madagascar's Overcrowded Prisons

14. (SBU) Given the deplorable conditions in Madagascar's prison system, Post's Human Rights Report has consistently highlighted prison conditions as the most serious violations of human rights. AF/E Director Reddick received a briefing from International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Country Director Maziar Mostafavi for the latest update on conditions. The ICRC just completed an assessment of a sample including 13 of Madagascar's prisons around the country. Abuse and neglect of prisoners remains a top concern, as does the acute problem of overcrowding.

15. (SBU) Following the assessment, ICRC will soon make a decision

about maintaining its presence in Madagascar to continue its assistance in prisons. Political will, Mostafavi insisted, must be backed up by concrete actions and immediate improvements in prison conditions.

Presidency Prisons Pilot

¶6. (SBU) The Norwegian advisor to the President on Good Governance, Petter Langseth, freely acknowledged the sorry state of Madagascar's prisons and its judicial backlog. He said the problem with most solutions previously considered, including a project by the European Union, is that they were capital intensive and would deplete Madagascar's scarce financial resources. Langseth's alternative is to use the substantial land holdings in the prison system to generate revenue and make the prisons self-sustaining. Simultaneously he would ease overcrowding by clearing the cases of prisoners awaiting trial. Finally, he would introduce job training skills to decrease recidivism. Langseth presented this project, with a USD 333,000 budget for three model prisons, and sought U.S. funding to help launch it, noting that it responds to the criticisms we have raised in the Human Rights Report. Reddick accepted the proposal but made no promises on funding, noting that it remains the GOM's responsibility to improve its human rights record regardless of whether it receives outside funding to do so.

National Democratic Institute Building on Success

¶7. (SBU) AF/E Director Reddick met with newly-arrived Country Director for the National Democratic Institute (NDI) Scott Kearin to discuss follow-up steps on electoral reform in Madagascar. NDI continues to reinforce the capacity of Malagasy democracy promoting NGOs and plans to organize a senior elections official from a Southern African Development Community (SADC) country to visit Madagascar. Efforts will follow two parallel tracks: one, to continue to advocate for electoral reforms to include use of a

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single ballot and an independent electoral commission; two, to address longer-term needs for political party development and civic education.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Prime Minister Rabemananjara was soft-spoken in our meeting, but the senior General carries a big stick in his internal Cabinet meetings. The prisons crisis in Madagascar remains a black mark on the country's otherwise satisfactory human rights record. The Presidency plan to improve them sounds plausible, but like the ICRC we need to see action and a commitment of the GOM's own resources, instead of talk. END COMMENT.

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